

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3960

S E C R E T RABAT 6965

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CHEROKEE FOR THE SECRETARY

E. O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: XF, MO, US, IS, EG

SUBJ: KING HASSAN BRIEFED ON PRIME MINISTER BEGIN'S VISIT; COMMENTS
ON MIDDLE EAST DEVELOPMENTS

REF: STATE 301498

1. DURING DECEMBER 20 40-MINUTE AUDIENCE WITH KING HASSAN AT HIS COUNTRY HOUSE IN JNANE AL-KEBIR ON OUTSKIRTS OF MARRAKECH, I COVERED ORALLY ALL POINTS IN YOUR TELEGRAM. ALSO PRESENT WERE ROYAL COUNSELORS DRISS SLAOUI AND REDA GUEDIRA AND FOREIGN MINISTER BOUCETTA. INDICATIVE OF HASSAN'S INTEREST IN YOUR MESSAGE WERE (A) HIS DECISION TO RECEIVE ME HALF-HOUR AFTER I ASKED FOR APPOINTMENT AFTERNOON BEFORE, (B) MAKING PLANE AVAILABLE FOR FOLLOWING MORNING, AND (C) HIS OPENING COMMENT THAT BUT FOR IMPORTANCE HE ATTACHED TO SUBJECT OF MEETING HE WOULD HAVE POSTPONED AUDIENCE BECAUSE OF INFLUENZA BUG WHICH HAD JUST HIT HIM (HE WAS COUGHING, AND NOT IN TOP FORM).

2. KING EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR YOUR PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON BEGIN VISIT, AND ASKED THAT I CONVEY HIS SINCERE THANKS TO YOU FOR THIS HELPFUL INFORMATION. BY WAY OF GENERAL COMMENT, HASSAN SAID, WITH A SMILE OF ONE WHO MAY KNOW MORE
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OF BEGIN'S THINKING BECAUSE OF HIS OWN CONTACTS, THAT THE ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER COULD OF COURSE NOT REVEAL ALL DETAILS OF HIS THINKING IN WASHINGTON AS HE MUST HAVE ADDITIONAL SUBSTANCE TO CONVEY TO SADAT DURING THEIR DECEMBER 25 MEETING.

3. KING SAID THAT HE REMAINED OPTIMISTIC OVER CURRENT MOMENTUM TOWARD PEACE, AND THAT HE WAS IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH ALL THE

PARTIES. "WE HAVE ENTERED A DANGEROUS GAME" IN GIVING FULL SUPPORT TO SADAT'S HISTORIC INITIATIVE, BUT THERE IS NO OTHER CHOICE. SADAT HAS OBVIOUSLY STAKED HIS FUTURE ON THE PRESENT COURSE. AND BY ACCEPTING SADAT'S INITIATIVE, BEGIN TOO HAS MOVED IRREVERSIBLY ON THE ROAD TO PEACE, AND WILL CONTINUE TO THE END FOR TWO REASONS. FIRST, HE REALIZES THERE ARE ONLY TWO OPTIONS FOR ISRAEL IN THE MIDDLE EAST: (A) WITH PEACE, RADICALS IN THE AREA WILL BE TOPPLED OR GREATLY WEAKENED, MODERATES WILL BE STRENGTHENED AND SOVIET INFLUENCE WILL BE ELIMINATED; OR (B) WITH NO PEACE, THE MODERATES (OR THE "WISE" AS HE PREFERS TO CALL SADAT, HUSSEIN AND EVEN ASSAD PERSONALLY) WILL BE OUT, THE RADICALS WILL TAKE OVER, SOVIET INFLUENCE WILL BE REESTABLISHED AND ISRAEL WILL FACE WAR. SECONDLY, BEGIN HAS THE COURAGE TO DEPART FROM THE PAST, AND, UNLIKE HIS PREDECESSOR RABIN, HAS THE POLITICAL BACKING TO MAKE THE NECESSARY CONCESSIONS. ON THE LATTER POINT KING SAID HE KNEW FROM HIS TALKS WITH DAYAN "AND OTHERS" THAT DAYAN, YADIN AND WEIZMAN WERE FULLY BEHIND BEGIN'S CURRENT EFFORTS AND WOULD BACK HIM ALL THE WAY TO ACHIEVE A FINAL PEACE.

4. TURNING TO THE TRIPOLI REJECTIONISTS, HASSAN NOTED THAT OF THIS GROUP SYRIA WAS OF THE GREATEST CONCERN AS PEACE WAS EXCLUDED WITHOUT ITS EVENTUAL PARTICIPATION. EVERYTHING POSSIBLE MUST BE DONE TO BRING THEM ALONG. HE WOULD CONTINUE HIS EFFORTS AND HE HOPED THAT YOU AND THE PRESIDENT WOULD DO LIKEWISE. HE NOTED PARENTHETICALLY THAT ONCE SYRIA JOINED THE PEACE PROGRESS, THE
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ABILITY OF BOUMEDIENE AND QADHAFI, BOTH OF WHOM ARE DEPENDENT ON THE SOVIETS, TO CREATE TROUBLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST OR ELSEWHERE WOULD BE GREATLY REDUCED.

5. REGARDING HIS CURRENT EFFORTS WITH SYRIA, THE KING IS CLEARLY FRUSTRATED AND TROUBLED, BUT HE HAS NOT GIVEN UP HOPE FOR THREE REASONS: (A) HE SHARES DR. KISSINGER'S APPRAISAL OF ASSAD AS A HARD NEGOTIATOR BUT A PRACTICAL MAN WHO IN THE END CAN BE EXPECTED TO SEE REASON; (B) THE PEOPLE OF SYRIA WANT PEACE AND APPROVE SADAT'S INITIATIVE; AND (C) DAYAN HAS TOLD HIM THAT IN THE CONTEXT OF A GLOBAL SETTLEMENT THE GOLAN COULD RETURN TO SYRIA PROVIDED ARRANGEMENTS ARE MADE FOR ISRAEL'S SECURITY.

6. HASSAN WENT ON TO SAY WITH SOME BITTERNESS THAT HIS ROYAL COUNSELOR AHMED BENSOUDA HAD BEEN IN SYRIA THREE DAYS EARLIER, BUT THAT ASSAD HAS REFUSED TO RECEIVE HIM ON THE PRETEXT OF ILLNESS, AND THAT KHADDAM HAD ALSO REFUSED TO SEE HIM, WHICH WAS NOT SURPRISING IN VIEW OF HIS EXTREMIST ATTITUDES. FROM CONVERSATIONS BENSOUDA DID HAVE, HOWEVER, KING DID NOT CONSIDER SYRIAN INTRANSIGENCE PERMANENT.

7. ELABORATING ON REASONS FOR ASSAD'S CURRENT NON-PARTICIPATION

IN PEACE PROCESS, KING BELIEVED INTERNAL WEAKNESS OF THE REGIME WAS PRIMARY DETERRENT, MORE IMPORTANT THAN DIRECT PRESSURES FROM IRAQ OR THE SOVIETS. HE VIEWED ASSAD AS A PRISONER OF COLLEGIAL SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT IN WHICH THE BAATH PARTY PLAYS DOMINANT ROLE. THIS SITUATION MAKES IT ALL THE MORE DIFFICULT FOR ASSAD BECAUSE PARTY OWES ITS RETENTION OF POWER PRINCIPALLY TO CONFRONTATION WITH ISRAEL IN FACE OF POPULAR DESIRE FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT, AND MUST ALSO KEEP EYE ON THE MORE RADICAL BRANCH IN IRAQ.

8. IN COMMENTING ON THE NECESSITY FOR A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT, KING INDICATED THAT SADAT HAD TOLD HIM EGYPT WOULD NOT SIGN ANY AGREEMENT ALONE WITH ISRAEL. (IN LATER CONVERSATION, ROYAL COUNSELOR DRISS SALAOUI EXPLAINED THAT SADAT HAD, HOWEVER, NOT
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COMMITTED HIMSELF TO ALLOW A SYRIAN VETO ON MOVEMENT TOWARD PEACE, ESPECIALLY IF ISRAEL OFFERED REASONABLE TERMS WHICH SYRIA REJECTED). AT SAME TIME, SADAT DID NOT SEE A SERIOUS PROBLEM REGARDING SUBSEQUENT JORDANIAN ENTRY INTO PEACE PROCESS. ONCE JORDAN HAD JOINED IN, THIS POSITIVE EVOLUTION MIGHT WELL ENCOURAGE SYRIA TO FOLLOW, IN KING'S JUDGMENT. HASSAN THEN SPECULATED THAT, WHILE HE HAD NO INFORMATION AT HAND, HE COULD ENVISAGE A SUCCESSFUL COUP AS A POSSIBLE WAY SYRIA MIGHT BE BROUGHT INTO THE NEGOTIATIONS, BY EITHER ASSAD RIDDING HIMSELF OF RADICAL SUCH AS KHADDAM OR BY THE REPLACEMENT OF THE ENTIRE REGIME WITH THOSE LEADERS FAVORING NEGOTIATIONS, WHICH WOULD RECEIVE POPULAR SUPPORT.

9. KING NEXT SAID THAT ROYAL COUNSELOR BENSOU DA HAD ALSO SEEN ARAFAT IN DAMASCUS. ARAFAT HAD "THROWN UP HIS HANDS" PLEADING INABILITY TO ACT INDEPENDENTLY OF SYRIA BECAUSE THE 300,000 PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON WERE NOTHING MORE THAN HOSTAGES OF SYRIA WITH ITS 30,000 TROOPS STILL IN LEBANON.

10. IN CONCLUDING THE AUDIENCE, KING SAID THAT, ON RETURNING TO RABAT IN NEXT FEW DAYS, HE WISHED TO WRITE PRESIDENT CARTER A PERSONAL LETTER ON HIS CURRENT THINKING ON THE MIDDLE EAST, AS WELL AS ANY HELPFUL INFORMATION ACQUIRED DURING HIS CONTINUING CONTACTS WITH MIDDLE EAST LEADERS. KING ENDED BY REITERATING THE VALUE HE ATTACHES TO HIS DIALOGUE WITH YOU AND THE PRESIDENT AND LOOKS FORWARD TO FURTHER EXCHANGES DURING THE CRITICAL PERIOD AHEAD.
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